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CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 007890

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2021
TAGS: PREL CH PP
SUBJECT: PRC EVACUATES OVER 300 CHINESE FROM SOLOMON

REF: A. CANBERRA 00601

¶B. WELLINGTON 00298

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Classified By: Political External Unit Chief Edgard Kagan.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The PRC evacuation of over 300 overseas Chinese and Hong Kong residents from the riot-torn Solomon Islands has been front page news for the past two days. The efforts included 5 chartered planes, although the first only arrived in Honiara two days after the cessation of violence. China also negotiated for over 30 Chinese to be flown out on Australian and New Zealand military aircraft. An MFA Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs official called the situation "urgent and complicated," with the biggest priority being the safety and safe return of Chinese citizens while responding appropriately to the non-PRC ethnic Chinese who are clamoring for assistance. End Summary.

Evacuations and Homecoming Front-page News

¶2. (U) The PRC mobilization of resources to evacuate overseas Chinese targeted by rioters in the Solomon Islands has been front page news for the past two days, with newspapers and websites April 25 carrying images of joyous, flag-waving Chinese landing in Guangzhou after taking a government-chartered China Southern Airlines flight from Papua New Guinea. After two days of violence that started on April 18 in the Solomon Islands capital of Honiara and was directed largely against the approximately 400 Chinese residents and the Chinatown area, the PRC sent four chartered planes to Honiara on April 22 to begin evacuating the Chinese residents. In all, 310 overseas Chinese, including 21 Hong Kong residents, were flown to Port Moresby, where they were met by consular officials from the PRC Embassy. On April 24, the evacuated Chinese boarded a chartered Boeing 777 and flew to Guangzhou.

MFA on Non-PRC Passport Holding Chinese

¶3. (C) According to MFA Department of North American and

Oceanian Affairs officer Zhang Zhao, the PRC's biggest priority is the safety of its citizens and ensuring their safe return to China. Zhang said many ethnic Chinese who hold Solomon Island passports are also requesting PRC government assistance in leaving the islands. Although the Chinese government only provides assistance to PRC passports holders, continued Zhang, Beijing recognizes that houses and businesses have been burnt down and assistance seekers have nowhere else to go. Calling the situation urgent and complicated, Zhang said the MFA is examining the status of each person seeking on a case-by-case basis.

China Seeks International Assistance

¶4. (C) Prior to arranging the charter flights to evacuate Chinese from Honiara, Beijing reached out for international assistance, according to Australian and New Zealand Embassy officials. Australian Embassy political officer Scott Dewar said an MFA Consular Affairs Department Deputy Director General requested a briefing last week on the situation in Honiara and asked for Canberra's assistance in evacuating Chinese nationals. As a result, twenty Chinese were given seats on an Australian military aircraft leaving Honiara. New Zealand Embassy officer Grahame Morton said the PRC negotiated the evacuation of 11 PRC-passport holders on a New Zealand military aircraft to Auckland. Chinese consular officials in Canberra and Auckland worked on repatriating the evacuees back to China.

Perception of Honiara's Chinese Community

¶5. (C) Morton, who previously served in the Pacific Island region, said Honiara's Chinatown plays a significant commercial role in the Solomon Islands. The Chinese businesses are known for establishing niche markets, such

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as supplying consumer goods to the outlying islands, where most other indigenous commercial enterprises refuse to do business due to the risks involved. On the other hand, he asserted that the resident Chinese population is not fully welcome as it is associated with corruption involving local politicians, large and shady land deals and tax evasion.

SEDNEY